

Message Text

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21

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01

USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 /030 W
----- 027952

R 191835Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9146

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION BERLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 02627

E.O. 11652: XGDS -1

TAGS: EEC

SUBJECT: DIRECT ELECTIONS TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

REF: (A) LONDON 0940 (B) 75 LONDON 17566

1. IN A GREEN (DISCUSSION) PAPER PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 17 ON DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT REAFFIRMED ITS COMMITMENT TO EARLY DIRECT ELECTIONS BUT MAINTAINED ITS CAUTIOUS APPROACH TO THE TARGET DATE OF MAY/JUNE 1978, ABOUT WHICH IT STATED, "HMG HAVE SOME DOUBTS ABOUT THE PRACTICABILITY OF SO EARLY A DATE." THE WAFFLE CONTINUED "HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT TAKES THE VIEW THAT THE NECESSARY CONSULTATIONS AND PROCEDURES MUST BE CARRIED OUT IN AN ORDERLY WAY AND SHOULD NOT BE RUSHED. NEVERTHELESS, THEY BELIEVE THAT PARLIAMENT WILL WISH THE WORK TO BE COMPLETED WITH ALL REASONABLE SPEED."

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2. THE GREEN PAPER, WHICH WILL SERVE AS THE MATRIX FOR WHAT PROMISES TO BE A LIVELY PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE WITHIN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. WAS IN ESSENCE SIMPLY A SERIES OF QUESTIONS RELATING TO DIRECT ELECTIONS AND HMG PRESERVED ITS PREROGATIVES AND ITS FINAL POSITION ON ALL THE MAIN ISSUES:

- TIMING OF THE FIRST DIRECT ELECTION IN BRITAIN (WILL TRY FOR 1978 BUT MAY NOT MAKE IT).
- SIZE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ("PRELIMINARY" VIEW IS THAT EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY'S FIGURE OF 355 WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE).
- ALLOCATION OF NATIONAL SEATS (AIM TO ALLOT NUMBER OF SEATS IN EACH COUNTRY ACCORDING TO ITS POPULATION, BUT RECOGNIZE THERE HAS TO BE MINIMUM REPRESENTATION FOR SMALLER STATES).
- ELECTORAL SYSTEM TO BE USED WITHIN BRITAIN (STRONG INFERENCE IS FIRST-PAST-THE-POST, NOT PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION).
- DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS WITHIN THE UK (COMPLICATED MATTER WHICH PARLIAMENT WOULD HAVE TO CAREFULLY CONSIDER) ARD
- THE ADVISABILITY OF DUAL MANDATE (PROBABLY ACCEPTABLE BUT WOULD IMPOSE HEAVY BURDEN ON THOSE MP'S WHO HELD TWO SEATS).

IN FACT. ABOUT THE ONLY POINT MADE UNEQUIVOCALLY IN THE GREEN PAPER IS THAT BRITAIN WOULD NOT FOLLOW THE CONTINENTAL TRADITION AND VOTE ON SUNDAY.

3. COMMENT: HAROLD WILSON WILL CARRY WITH HIM TO THE APRIL 1 EUROPEAN COUNCIL MEETING IN LUXEMBOURG THIS CONTINUING CAUTIOUS APPROACH TO THE DETAILS OF DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. AS WE REPORTED IN REFTELS A AND B. THIS HESITANCY IS BORN OF THE TRADITIONS OF PARLIAMENTARY SUPREMACY IN BRITAIN. IT ALSO FLOWS FROM THE OLDBUT EVER-ALIVE ANTAGONISMS WITHIN THE LABOR PARTY BETWEEN PRO- AND ANTI- MARKETEERS. FINALLY, IT IS MAGNIFIED BY THE CURRENT DEVOLUTION DEBATE HERE WHICH HAS SENSITIZED HMG TO THE QUESTION OF HOW MANY BRITISH
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REPRESENTATIVES THE 3.7 MILLION SCOTTISH ELECTORS AND THE 2 MILLION WELSH WOULD SEND TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT COMPARED, SAY, TO THE 350,000 LUXEMBOURGERS. SO, WHILE HMG WILL GO ON SAYING THEY DO NOT INTEND TO BE "LAGGARDS" ON DIRECT ELECTIONS. IT LOOKS FROM LONDON AS THOUGH ON THIS MATTER WILSON'S FOOT WILL CONTINUE TO BE. IF NOT AS OBVIOUSLY ON THE BRAKE. CERTAINLY NOT ON THE THROTTLE EITHER.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 FEB 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976LONDON02627
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760063-0636
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760235/aaaabemx.tel
Line Count: 117
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 LONDON 940, 76 LONDON 17566
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 MAR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <30 MAR 2004 by greeneet>; APPROVED <31 MAR 2004 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DIRECT ELECTIONS TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PGOV, XG, UK, EEC
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006